

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4190
INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GEORGETOWN 0325

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, GY
SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER FEBRUARY 7:
US-GUYANESE RELATIONS AND INTERNAL AFFAIRS

REF: GEORGETOWN 308

SUMMARY: FONMIN WILLS IS PLEASED OVER PROSPECTS FOR AN
EARLY MEETING WITH SECRETARY VANCE AND HAS COMMENDED
THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION FOR ITS INITIAL APPROACH TO
NORTH-SOUTH AND AFRICAN ISSUES. DURING OUR FEBRUARY 7
MEETING, I EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER ANTI-US SLANT IN LOCAL
PRESS DURING RECENT MONTHS. WILLS AGREED WITH MY
ASSESSMENT AND SAID HE WOULD HELP, BUT ADDED THAT
POLITICAL FACTORS--1978 ELECTIONS, THE JAGAN THREAT,
DETERIORATING ECONOMY AND LINGERING SUSPICIONS OF
US--WERE HINDRANCES TO ANY SUDDEN REVERSAL OF THE
SITUATION. IN DISCUSSING GUYANESE SUSPICIONS OF US,
WILLS ADMITTED HE HAD OVER-INTERPRETED SECRETARY KISSINGER'S
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MESSAGE CONCERNING CUBAN PRESENCE IN ANGOLA EARLY LAST
YEAR AND SUBSEQUENTLY THOUGHT CUBAN EXILE TERRORISM WAS
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SECRETARY'S WORDS. HE NOW
RECOGNIZED THAT HIS INTERPRETATION HAD BEEN WRONG. WE HAVE
SEEN EVIDENCE THIS WEEK THAT PRESS COVERAGE OF US IS IMPROVING.
END SUMMARY.

1. THIS SECOND CABLE ON MY FEBRUARY 7 CONVERSATION WITH FONMIN WILLS REPORTS OUR EXCHANGE ON TRENDS IN GUYANESE FOREIGN POLICY, DOMESTIC POLITICS AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, THE PERCEIVED THREAT FROM CHEDDI JAGAN AND HIS PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP), US-GUYANESE RELATIONS AND DESTABILIZATION.

2. WILLS BEGAN OUR MEETING BY SAYING HE HAD RECEIVED A CALL FROM AMBASSADOR MANN FOLLOWING THE LATTER'S MEETING WITH SECRETARY VANCE AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY TODMAN. HE DID NOT COMMENT ON THE MEETING EXCEPT TO SAY THAT HE EXPECTED TO VISIT SECRETARY VANCE IN LATE FEBRUARY OR EARLY MARCH AND HE WAS PLEASED WITH THE PROSPECT OF MEETING BOTH THE SECRETARY AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY TODAN. WILLS EXPRESSED APPROVAL OF THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S INITIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS ON NORTH-SOUTH ISSUES AND ESPECIALLY ON SOUTHERN AFRICA.

3. AFTER WE COMPLETED OUR DISCUSSIONS OF WILLS' CUBA TRIP (REFTEL), I SHIFTED THE CONVERSATION TO US-GUYANESE RELATIONS. I SAID THAT IT SEEMED TO ME THAT THE TONE OF THE PRESS IN COVERING MATTERS CONCERNING THE US WAS NEGATIVE. THIS I SAID MIGHT IMPEDE OUR EFFORTS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS BECAUSE THE CUMULATIVE EFFECT WOULD BE TO AROUSE ANTI-US SENTIMENT AMONG THE GUYANESE PEOPLE AND RAISE QUESTIONS ON US SIDE ABOUT SINCERITY OF GOG INTENTIONS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS. WILLS AGREED THAT THE PRESS WAS A PROBLEM AND SAID HE HAD BEEN TRYING TO HAVE THE INFORMATION FUNCTION TRANSFERRED FROM THE MINISTRY

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OF INFORMATION AND CULTURE TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY SO AS TO CHANGE THAT PROBLEM, BUT SO FAR HE HAD NOT SUCCEEDED. HE COMMENTED THAT HE WOULD SEE WHAT COULD BE DONE, BUT ADDED THAT HIS RELATIONS WITH SHIRLEY FIELD-RIDLEY, MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND CULTURE, WERE NOT GOOD. I TOLD HIM I HAD DISCUSSED THE MATTER WITH HUBERT JACK (MINISTER OF ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES AND ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER DURING WILLS' ABSENCE) AND THAT JACK HAD SAID HE WOULD SPEAK WITH FIELD-RIDLEY.

4. WILLS COMMENTED THAT MODERATION WAS DIFFICULT TO IMPOSE BECAUSE MUCH IDEOLOGICAL ONEUPMANSHIP WAS GOING ON AMONG GOG OFFICIALS, SEVERAL OF WHOM WERE TRYING TO PROVE THEY WERE BETTER SOCIALISTS THAN THE OTHERS. WILLS SAID THAT A CERTAIN RADICAL MOMENTUM HAD BUILT UP WHICH COULD NOT BE REVERSED IMMEDIATELY. PREVAILING EMOTIONS AND ATTITUDES MADE IT DIFFICULT TO MAKE MEANINGFUL GESTURES TOWARD IMPROVING US-GUYANESE

RELATIONS. BURNHAM HAD TO BE CAREFUL HOW HE HANDLED THE RADICALS BECAUSE HE NEEDED THEM FOR THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN PRIOR TO THE 1978 ELECTION. I COMMENTED THAT I HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT MANY GUYANESE OF BOTH RACES WERE ESSENTIALLY MODERATE IN OUTLOOK AND, MOREOVER, WERE LESS THAN ENTHUSIASTIC OVER PRESENT TRENDS. WILLS AGREED, BUT SAID THAT THE CONSERVATIVES IN THE PNC, WHILE NUMEROUS, HAD TOTALLY IDENTIFIED WITH BURNHAM AND WOULD FOLLOW WHEREVER HE WOULD LEAD. THEY RECOGNIZED THE THREAT FROM JAGAN AND UNDERSTOOD THE GAME THAT BURNHAM WAS PLAYING WITH THE LEFT. MOREOVER, THEY WERE IN NO POSITION TO LOOK TO ANYONE ELSE. THEREFORE, BURNHAM'S STRATEGY HAD BEEN TO CONSOLIDATE LEFT-WING SUPPORT.

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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R 111955Z FEB 77
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5. I REMARKED THAT IT APPEARED TO ME THAT THE ONEUPMANSHIP HAD EXTENDED INTO THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES LAST MONTH. CHEDDI JAGAN AND OTHER OPPOSITION SPEAKERS SKILLFULLY HAD PUT THE GOG ON THE DEFENSIVE BY DENIGRATING THE BRAND OF SOCIALISM ESPOUSED BY THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS (PNC), AND LATTER'S SPEAKERS APPARENTLY HAD FELT THEY HAD TO PROVE THEIR SOCIALIST CREDENTIALS. WILLS THEN SAID THAT BURNHAM WAS OBSESSED WITH THE THREAT OF JAGAN. BURNHAM STILL FELT HE HAD TO ESTABLISH THE LEGITIMACY OF HIS REGIME.

HE EXPLAINED THAT IT WAS WIDELY KNOWN (SIC) THAT THE PNC'S VICTORIES FROM 1964 ONWARD WERE ACHIEVED BY FRAUD. THE PRIME MINISTER NOW WANTED A LEGITIMATE VICTORY. HE, THEREFORE, WAS TRYING TO WEAKEN AND OUTFLANK JAGAN. IF THE SOVIETS AND CUBANS WOULD PERSUADE JAGAN TO STOP CRITICIZING BURNHAM, JAGAN'S PRESTIGE AND SUPPORT WOULD DECLINE IN HIS EAST INDIAN CONSTITUENCY.

6. THE NEW CONSTITUTION THE GOG WAS WORKING ON, WILLS
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SAID, WOULD FORCE JAGAN TO COME TO TERMS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OR BE LEFT OUT IN THE COLD. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTIONING, WILLS INSISTED THAT THE CONSTITUTION WOULD BE A GUYANESE DOCUMENT BASED UPON GUYANESE TRADITIONS AND REALITIES. ALTHOUGH THE TRADITIONAL WESTMINSTER MODEL OF GOVERNMENT WAS NOT SUITABLE FOR GUYANA, IT WAS PART OF GUYANA'S TRADITION. THE NEW CONSTITUTION WOULD NOT BE A TOTAL DEPARTURE FROM THAT MODEL. IN THE AREA OF HUMAN RIGHTS, HOWEVER, IT WOULD NOT BE ALL THE UNITED STATES WOULD LIKE IT TO BE.

7. I MENTIONED THAT A PRENSA LATINA REPORT OF AN INTERVIEW WILLS HAD GIVEN IN HAVANA INDICATED HE HAD SAID THAT THE DESTABILIZATION ISSUE WOULD BE DISCUSSED AT THE NON-ALIGNED FOREIGN MINISTERS MEEING IN NEW DELHI. I SAID THAT REPETITION OF THIS THEME WOULD HURT OUR EFFORTS TO IMPROVE US-GUYANESE RELATIONS. WILLS REPLIED THAT WE COULD NOT EXPECT GUYANA TO DROP THE SUBJECT SUDDENLY. BY INSISTING THAT HE DO SO, I WAS GRINDING HIM TO PIECES. HE SAID SUPICIONS THAT HE AND BURNHAM HAD ABOUT THE US BEING INVOLVED IN THE CUBANA AIRLINER CRASH AHD BEEN DISPELLED, BUT MANY PNC RADICALS STILL BELIEVED IN DESTABILIZATION AND WERE PUSHING IT AS AN ISSUE. MOREOVER, CUBAN EXILES WERE ENGAGED IN DESTABILIZATION.

8. WILLS THEN SAID THAT SECRETARY KISSINGER'S ASSURANCES HAD LACKED CREDIBILITY, PARTLY BECAUSE OF THE REVELATIONS CONCERNING ALLENDE'S DOWNFALL AND OTHER CIA ACTIVITY. BUT THE MAIN REASON FOR HIS AND BURNHAM'S SUSPICION WAS KISSINGER'S COMMENTS TO HIM ABOUT THE AMERICAN RESPONSE TO CUBA IN ANGOLA. THE SECRETARY, ACCORDING TO WILLS, HAD SAID THAT THE AMERICAN ANSWER TO CUBA IN ANGOLA WOULD NOT BE IN ANGOLA, BUT IN THE CARIBBEAN. THUS, WHEN THE RASH OF TERRORIST ACTS OCCURRED LAST YEAR, WILLS HAD BELIEVED THAT THIS WAS
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THE RESPONSE THAT KISSINGER HAD THREATENED. THE BOMBINGS OF JUNE, JULY, SEPTEMBER AND FINALLY THE CUBANA AIRLINER SABOTAGE HAD SEEMED TO FIT INTO A PATTERN. IN RETROSPECT, WILLS SAID HE NOW REALIZED KISSINGER HAD NOT MEANT THAT THE DANGER WOULD COME THROUGH CUBAN EXILES, HOWEVER, THE SUSPICION THAT THE US STILL MIGHT BE MANIPULATING THE CUBAN EXILE GROUPS RAN STRONG THROUGHOUT THE CARIBBEAN. AS USUAL, I REJECTED STRONGLY ANY IDEA THAT THE US WOULD BACK SUCH ATROCIOUS ACTS.

9. COMMENT: SINCE MY RETURN, I HAVE TALKED TO SEVERAL CABINET MINISTERS AND OTHERS WHO HAVE IN ONE DEGREE OR ANOTHER CONFIRMED WILLS' PESSIMISTIC VIEW ABOUT REDUCING SIGNIFICANTLY RADICAL RHETORIC BEFORE THE ELECTIONS NEXT YEAR, ALTHOUGH MINISTER OF ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES HUBERT JACK PROMISED ME THAT HE WOULD URGE THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND CULTURE TO ASSURE POSITIVE COVERAGE OF NEWS ITEMS CONCERNING THE US. WE HAVE SEEN EVIDENCE THIS WEEK OF IMPROVED PRESS COVERAGE OF THE UNITED STATES. THE COMBINATION OF THE ELECTIONS NEXT YEAR, DETERIORATING ECONOMY, AND THE THREAT FROM JAPAN ARE CAUSING GOG OFFICIALS SERIOUS CONCERN. THE GOG TACTIC APPEARS TO BE TO TRY TO ENLIST CUBAN AND SOVIET ASSISTANCE IN NEUTRALIZING JAPAN AND TO RIG THE NEW CONSTITUTION AGAINST JAPAN IN SOME WAY. ALTHOUGH THE DESTABILIZATION ISSUE HAD BEEN USED BY THE GOG TO TRY TO CREATE NATIONAL UNITY, SUSPICION THAT THE US MIGHT HAVE ENGAGED IN SUCH ACTIVITIES WAS HARBORED EVEN AT THE TOP LEVELS OF THE GOG. GOG OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, APPEAR INCLINED TO PLACE GREATER THRUST IN THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION. IN ANY EVENT THE CHANGE IN ADMINISTRATION HAS GIVEN THEM AN OPPORTUNITY TO START ANEW WITHOUT IMPINGING UNDULY ON THEIR RATHER SENSITIVE PRIDE. RECEPTION WHICH I HAVE HAD SINCE MY RETURN BY WILLS AND OTHER GOG OFFICIALS SEEMS TO INDICATE THEY WANT TO

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IMPROVE US-GUYANESE RELATIONS. THEY HAVE EXPRESSED OPTIMISM THAT THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION WILL ADOPT ENLIGHTENED POLICIES TOWARD GUYANA AND THIRD WORLD ISSUES. END COMMENT.

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Message Attributes

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